

# DHMH Honors Businesses for Support of Breastfeeding Employees

*Department Stands Ready to Help Businesses Implement New Health Care Reform Requirements for Breastfeeding Support*

## Department of Health & Mental Hygiene News Release

**Baltimore, MD (August 31, 2010)** - This summer, as in past years, Governor Martin O'Malley proclaimed August to be "Breastfeeding Month" in Maryland. As August comes to a close, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) honors three employers across the state whose programs and policies support new mothers to continue breastfeeding their babies after they return to work. These employers will be recognized with the Department's "Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace Award."

**The honorees are:**

- Anne Arundel Medical Center
- Greater Baltimore Medical Center
- Johns Hopkins Hospital

"These employers are leaders by example in enhancing the well-being of their employees and their families," said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers.

It takes little investment on the part of an employer to provide a "breastfeeding-friendly workplace," just short break periods and a small, clean, private space for breastfeeding employees to pump and store breast milk. But the return on this investment is significant.

"The health benefits of breastfeeding for babies and mothers are clear," said Secretary Colmers. "With this award we're highlighting the benefits to business as well."

Benefits for business include less absenteeism and lower healthcare costs. Mothers (and fathers) miss fewer days of work because breastfed infants are sick less often. Healthcare costs are reduced because breastfed babies have fewer doctor visits, fewer hospitalizations, and need fewer prescriptions. Studies estimate a \$400 savings on health care in just the first year of life for every breastfed baby.

Businesses also benefit with higher employee morale and increased productivity. Breastfeeding mothers who have support in the workplace are more likely to return to work, and to return earlier. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, nearly three-quarters of all mothers are in the work force, including 60% of mothers of very young children.

The new federal Health Care Reform law now requires that employers provide breastfeeding employees with reasonable break time and a private, clean place to pump breast milk during the workday for up to one year after the child's birth. Employers are not required to pay for the break time and employers of less than 50 employees can seek an exemption from these requirements if doing so would cause "undue hardship" on their business.

"DHMH is ready to offer guidance and technical support to Maryland businesses as they set up their breastfeeding support programs," said Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services Fran Phillips. "This is a win-win-win situation for employer, mom and baby."

Choosing to breastfeed is one of the earliest and most important decisions a mother makes with regard to her child's health. Health professionals agree that breastfeeding provides a host of health benefits for both babies and mothers. These include fewer illnesses and infections in young infants, less risk of

chronic illnesses and obesity in childhood, and lower risk of breast and ovarian cancer in women who breastfeed.

More information about the business benefits of breastfeeding, how to set up a breastfeeding support program in your business, and application for the Maryland Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace Award can be found at [www.marylandbreastfeeding.org](http://www.marylandbreastfeeding.org)

A recently issued Fact Sheet from the U.S. Department of Labor about the Health Care Reform requirements can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs73.htm> .